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ABSTRACT

The author argues that in educational settings in which there is a low tolerance for "disruptive" and "antisocial" behavior, the nurturing capacity for creativity is also low. Creative persons exhibit not only anti-social behaviors, but also behaviors such as originality, self-sufficiency, and independence in thought and judgment, which may be defined by a rigid educational setting as anti-social and disruptive. It is argued that disruptive behavior must be judged in the context of the meaning it has for the individual creating it, which may be a creative rather than a disruptive/destructive manifestation, rather than from the normative (and generally restrictive) standard. An educational environment that encourages one to consider disruptive behavior from this viewpoint is one in which real self-expression can occur. Such an environment is one in which creativity will have a greater opportunity for growth and development. Educational environments that consistently confirm the dignity and uniqueness of the individual will also encourage the creative expression of the individual. (Author/MJB)

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DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM: THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

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Session 1.06

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Disruptive Behavior in the Classroom: The Other Side of the Coin

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Much of the literature on creativity, when describing creative persons in behavioral terms, uses such descriptors as: radical,[1] agressive,[2] non-conforming,[3] introverted,[4] -- terms often characterized as "anti-social" or disruptive. Such anti-social behaviors often cause many problems for creative individuals among their teachers and peers in educational settings. More and more evidence suggests that the development of creativity "is not purely a curriculum matter, but depends upon interpersonal relationships."[5] Individuals who do not conform to the beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviors of the majority face ridicule and alienation. Such ridicule and alienation can cause the individual to feel considerably less positive about the "self." (While an individual may feel positive about the self, the individual needs positive feedback and confirmation about this aspect of the individual's reality from others.) When the incongruity between the individual's perception of reality and the "self" becomes too severe for the individual to cope, the seeds of mental pathology are nourished and begin to grow. While the positive value of conforming to certain rules of conduct for the benefit of all is recognized as necessary for "civilized" societies, not enough consideration has been given to the negative aspects of rigid adherence to conformity. I would submit that educational settings in which there is a low tolerance for "disruptive" or "anti-social" behavior are environments in which the nurturing of creativity is <u>also</u> low.

Let us return a moment to the literature's description of creative persons in behavioral terms. Not only do creative persons exhibit anti-social behaviors, creative persons also exhibit positive or socially desirable behaviors such as independence in thought and judgment,[6] originality,[7] self-sufficiency.[8]

The problem with understanding creativity by attaching significance to behavioral manifestations is that <u>society</u> (and all the "baggage" that the term implies) defines what is social and what is "anti" social. The evolution of norms of acceptable and unacceptable behavior will, therefore, be affected by the prejudices which exist at a given moment in history. These norms, distorted by whatever prejudices exist at a given moment, can limit the individual's <u>natural</u> growth toward realizing his or her potential. The purpose of the educational process is to facilitate the realization of human potential. If one accepts this purpose of the educational process and also accepts the fact that each individual is unique and unlike any other person or thing, then who is truly the best judge of what aids the development of an individual's potential--the individual or some external person or thing?

Creativity cannot be taught. Its growth and development can only be facilitated. Unfortunately we are at the infant stage in understanding creativity and those factors which encourage its growth and development. To understand creativity in others, the creativeness of the "self" must be examined. Consider your own beliefs, attitudes, and emotional feelings about who and what is creative. Perhaps you believe that creativity is a human trait reserved for a few within the whole of humanity. Perhaps, for you, the criterion of creativity is a new, useful product (ideas are also considered "products" in this context). Perhaps creativity is associated by you with endeavors in the arts or sciences and has no relevance for daily living. If you find yourself in general agreement with these statements about creativity, then I ask you to consider the following advancements in the spirit of open inquiry, that is, reserving judgement as to whether the advancements are true or false, according to your own belief systems.

Let us consider first the advancement that creativity is as much a human trait among all of humanity as is the capacity for love, growth, or thought. There is a natural inner desire, in all of humankind, to seek out those imperfections in the self and to strive to change these into perfections, according to one's own belief systems. Creativity is one of the processes at our disposal which aids us to satisfy this natural inner desire. What is more, we know it is there within us; we know its limitless potential; and we know we are just beginning to understand--thus to learn to use it more effectively--creativity. This knowing, however, resides in the inner self. One of the most negative aspects to the norm of conformity is that our culture teaches us not to pay attention to this inner self--especially when it conflicts with accepted norms. Therefore the true teachers, in the educational process which realizes that its raison d'etre is to facilitate the realization of human potential, are those who help us remember those things the inner self knows. We know, within the inner self, that creativity is a trait found in all of humankind. However, we have been taught to believe in the bell shaped curve, that there are a few people on one end that are "creative" and a few people at the other that are "blooming idiots" (or is it the other way around?) and a lot of "average" folk in the middle! The bell shaped curve is just inappropriate for a discussion about creativity. Those that believe that there are only a few creative individuals believe in a myth.

Now, perhaps, for some of you, the statement "one is only creative if the product one creates possesses the quality of 'newness' and/or 'usefulness'," is true. Let us, however, examine this requirement of newness and/or usefulness which is associated with creativity.

A product is judge creative if it is new--meaning one-of-a-kind or for-the-first-time. This criterion is not complete, however. The question "for whom?" must be answered before the quality of newness or usefulness can be applied. The statement, "one is only creative if the product one creates possesses the quality of newness and/or usefulness" is true, if the newness and/or usefulness is determined by the individual and not be societal criteria. Cézanne was creative before society agreed to the fact. If the idea is new to the individual, then the idea is a "creative" one. If the solution proves useful to the individual, then the solution is "creative." The inner self knows its revelations.

As a final consideration of those earlier statements with which you at first thought you agreed, let us consider creativity and its relevance to daily living. Earlier statements in this discussion implied that creativity is one process by which humanity realizes its potential. What is actually meant by that implication is that creativity is the process by which the individual resolves the problems of self actualization. (In truth of fact, it is the creativeness of the inner self that creates the problems.) Therefore, the encounters and confrontations we face in daily life are truly "new" and "useful" when we have used our creative energies in these experiences. However, because we lack understanding of creativity, we attempt to confine its use to activities commonly accepted by society. The self is a unique entity that employs creativity to express its uniqueness. It is creativity that permits the self to grow, to expand toward new dimensions of reality. Understanding creativity in this way will permit us to use it more effectively and will help us understand creativity in others, thus facilitating its growth in others.

Let us now return to the major premise of this paper--that educational settings in which there is a low tolerance for "disruptive" and "anti-social" behavior are environments in which the nurturing of creativity is also low. Before proceeding, however, the word "disruptive" must be addressed.

Behavior characterized as "disruptive" is behavior commonly understood as inconsiderate of others. Such behavior is egocentric; it is behavior that interrupts, that forces its will on others. Disruptive behavior is "anti-social." Our present societal norm regards disruptive behavior as a trait not to be encouraged. But who is to say what distorting prejudices are responsible for this disfavor? The civil rights movement of the sixties has shown us how positive and effective disruptive behavior can be. If disruptive behavior can, at times, be positive, productive, or beneficial, can we not pause briefly to consider the "disruptive" behavior of that student in class, who is unique and unlike any other person or thing, before reacting negatively toward it?

Now let us return to the premise statement which implies a direct relationship between an environment with a high tolerance for disruptive behavior and an environment which is conducive to the development of creativity. If, by pausing briefly to consider this disruptive behavior to which I am negatively reacting, because reacting negatively is the normative response, I also consider whether this particular disruptive behavior is the good "old fashion" kind that I can react to in the expected manner (negatively) or this "other" kind of disruptive behavior (à la civil rights movement) to which I must "creatively" invent a response, then by the mere fact that I have stopped to consider these things, it is likely that more disruptive behaviors will occur and escape harsh reaction. It is somewhat like the difference between instant reaction and thoughtful pro-action--the latter is deliberate, the former can be. The deliberation will often soften the negative reaction, if not cause the negative reaction not to occur at all.

An educational environment which encourages one to consider disruptive behavior in the context of the meaning it has for the individual causing it rather than encouraging the normative response to disruptive behavior, is one in which real self expression can occur. Such an environment is one in which creativity will have a greater opportunity for growth and development. Educational environments that consistently confirm the dignity and uniqueness of the individual will also encourage the creative expression of the individual.

It is hoped that the above discussion of the issues of this paper is not viewed as a discussion advocating chaos or anarchy in the classroom (or anywhere else, for that matter). Rather, it is hoped that the discussion has led to the conclusion that understanding creativity will not come by defining it, just as understanding love or the color yellow cannot come by defining either. If this latter thought is closer to your own conclusion, then this paper will have served its purpose.

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A BASIC APPROACH TO THE RECOGNITION OF UNIQUENESS AND INDIVIDUALITY

Creativity and Conformity. Clark Moustakes. New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1967. p. 10.

1. The individual knows himself better than anyone else.

2. Only the individual can develop his potentialities.

3. The individual's perception of his own feelings, attitudes, and ideas is more valid than any outside diagnosis can be.

4. The individual, to keep on growing as a self, must continue to believe in himself, regardless of what anyone else may think of him. The belief in one's own reality is a necessary condition to the fulfillment of that reality.

5. Objects have no meaning in themselves. Individuals give meanings and reality to them. These meanings reflect the individual's background of experience.

6. Every individual is consistent and logical in the context of his own personal experience. He may seem inconsistent and illogical to others when he is not understood.

7. As long as the individual accepts and values himself, he will continue to grow and develop his potentialities. When he does not accept and value himself, much of his energies will be used to defend rather than to explore and to actualize himself.

8. Every individual wants to grow toard self-fulfillment. These growth strivings are present at all times.

9. An individual learns significantly only those things which are involved in the maintenance or enhancement of self. No one can force the individual to learn. He will learn only if he wills to. Any other type of learning is temporary and inconsistent with the self and will disappear as soon as threat is removed.

10. We cannot teach another person directly. We can make real learning possible by providing information, the setting, atmosphere, materials, resources, and by being there. The learning process itself is a unique, individualistic experience.

11. Under threat, the self is less open to spontaneous expression--that is, more passive and controlled. When free from threat the self is more open--that is free to be and free to strive toward actualization.

12. The situation which most effectively promotes significant learning is one in which (a) the threat to the self is at a minimum while at the same time the uniqueness of the individual is regarded as worthwhile and is deeply respected; and (b) the person is free to explore the materials and resources available to him (or her) and to select his (or her) own experiences in the light of his (or her) own interests, desires, and potentialities.